

Service Date: September 14, 2001

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE REGULATION
BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

IN THE MATTER OF the Application of)	UTILITY DIVISION
PWI Holdings, Inc. dba Pacific West Internet)	
and Qwest Corporation)	DOCKET NO. D2001.4.47
Pursuant to Section 252(e) of the)	ORDER NO. 6365
Telecommunications Act of 1996 for)	
Approval of their Opt-In Agreement)	

FINAL ORDER

Introduction and Procedural Background

1. On February 8, 1996, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act)¹ was signed into law, ushering in a sweeping reform of the telecommunications industry that is intended to bring competition to the local exchange markets. The 1996 Act sets forth methods by which local competition may be encouraged in historically-monopolistic local exchange markets. The 1996 Act requires companies like Qwest Corporation (Qwest) to negotiate agreements with new competitive entrants in their local exchange markets. 47 U.S.C. §§ 251 and 252.

2. Qwest entered into an interconnection agreement with PWI Holdings, Inc. dba Pacific West Internet (PWI) for interconnection and resale of Qwest services according to the 1996 Act. Qwest filed the parties' Wireline Opt-In Interconnection Agreement (Agreement) with the Montana Public Service Commission (Commission) on April 17, 2001. The Agreement provides for interconnection and for PWI to resell Qwest's local exchange services in Montana.

Applicable Law and Commission Decision

3. The standards for approving an interconnection agreement differ, depending on whether the agreement has been voluntarily negotiated or has been arbitrated by a state commission. 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2). The Agreement submitted for approval in this proceeding was negotiated voluntarily by the parties and thus must be reviewed according to the provisions in 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2)(A).

4. Section 252(e)(4) of the 1996 Act provides that a negotiated agreement submitted for a state commission's approval must be approved or rejected within 90 days or it will be

¹ Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 47 U.S.C.).

deemed approved. Thus, Commission approval or rejection according to the standards set forth in the 1996 Act must issue by July 16, 2001, 90 days following the submission of PWI's Agreement for Commission approval.

5. The Commission must approve or reject the agreement, with written findings as to any deficiencies. 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(1). Section 252(e)(2)(A) prescribes the grounds for rejection of an agreement reached by voluntary negotiation:

- (2) GROUND FOR REJECTION. – The State commission may only reject –
 - (A) an agreement (or any portion thereof) adopted by negotiation under [47 U.S.C. § 252(a)] if it finds that
 - (i) the agreement (or portion thereof) discriminates against a telecommunications carrier not a party to the agreement; or
 - (ii) the implementation of such agreement or portion is not consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity[.]

6. Notwithstanding the limited grounds for rejection in 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2)(A), the Commission's authority is preserved in § 252(e)(3) to establish or enforce other requirements of Montana law in its review of arbitrated or negotiated agreements, including requiring compliance with state telecommunications service quality standards or requirements. Such compliance is subject to § 253 of the 1996 Act which does not permit states to impose any statutes, regulations, or legal requirements that prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting market entry.

7. Unlike an agreement reached through arbitration, a voluntarily negotiated agreement need not comply with standards set forth in §§ 251(b) and (c). 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(b), 252(c) and 252(a)(1) of the Act permit parties to agree to rates, terms and conditions for interconnection that may not be deemed just, reasonable and nondiscriminatory, and which are not determined according to the pricing standards included in § 252(c) of the Act, as would be required in the case of arbitrated rates set by the Commission.

8. By approving this Agreement, the Commission does not intend to imply that it approves of all the terms and conditions included in the Agreement and makes no findings herein on the appropriateness of many of the terms and conditions. Our interpretation of the 1996 Act is that §§ 252(a) and (c) prevent the Commission from addressing such issues in this proceeding.

9. The Commission finds that the terms in the Agreement appear to conform to the standards required by the Act and should be approved. In approving this Agreement, the Commission is guided by provisions in state and federal law which have been enacted to encourage the development of competitive telecommunications markets. Section 69-3-802, MCA, for example, states that it is the policy of the State of Montana to encourage competition in the telecommunications industry and to provide for an orderly transition to a competitive market environment.

10. PWI and Qwest can agree that nothing in their Agreement prohibits certain conduct, but if that conduct otherwise violates the law, the provision in the Agreement that sanctions such conduct is void. §§ 28-2-604, 28-2-701, 28-2-702, MCA. Any provision or term of this Agreement that is in conflict with the law, whether or not specifically addressed by the Commission, is rejected as a matter of law and not in the public interest.

Conclusions of Law

1. The Commission has authority to supervise, regulate and control public utilities. Section 69-3-102, MCA. Qwest is a public utility offering regulated telecommunications services in the State of Montana. Section 69-3-101, MCA.

2. PWI intends to resell Qwest's telecommunications services in Montana. As a reseller of regulated telecommunications services in Montana, PWI will be subject to Commission authority to supervise, regulate and control public utilities. Before providing services in Montana, PWI initially will be required to register with the Commission as a telecommunications provider and to provide the requested information to the Commission, if it has not already done so. § 69-3-805, MCA. Compliance with § 69-3-805(1)(e), MCA, has been waived by the Commission.

3. The Commission has authority to do all things necessary and convenient in the exercise of the powers granted to it by the Montana Legislature and to regulate the mode and manner of all investigations and hearings of public utilities and other parties before it. Section 69-3-103, MCA.

4. The United States Congress enacted the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to encourage competition in the telecommunications industry. Congress gave responsibility for much of the implementation of the 1996 Act to the states, to be handled by the state agency with regulatory control over telecommunications carriers. *See generally*, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub.L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (*amending scattered sections of the Communications Act of 1934*, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151, *et seq.*). The Montana Public Service Commission is the state agency charged with regulating telecommunications carriers in Montana and properly exercises jurisdiction in this Docket pursuant to Title 69, Chapter 3, MCA.

5. The Commission has jurisdiction to approve the resale agreement negotiated by the parties and submitted to the Commission for approval according to § 252(e)(2)(A). Section 69-3-103, MCA.

6. Approval of interconnection agreements by the Commission is subject to the requirements of federal law as set forth in 47 U.S.C. § 252. Section 252(e) limits the Commission's review of a negotiated agreement to the standards set forth therein for rejection of such agreements. Section 252(e)(4) requires the Commission to approve or reject the PWI Agreement by July 16, 2001, or the Agreement will be deemed approved.

7. The Commission may reject a portion of a negotiated agreement and approve the remainder of the agreement if such action is consistent with the public interest, convenience and necessity and does not discriminate against a carrier not a party to the agreement. 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2)(A).

Order

THEREFORE, based upon the foregoing, it is ORDERED that the agreement of the parties submitted to this Commission for approval pursuant to the 1996 Act is approved subject to the following condition:

The parties shall file subsequent amendments to the Agreement with the Commission for approval pursuant to the 1996 Act.

DONE AND DATED this 14th day of August, 2001, by a vote of 5 to 0.

BY ORDER OF THE MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

GARY FELAND, Chairman

JAY STOVALL, Vice Chairman

BOB ANDERSON, Commissioner

MATT BRAINARD, Commissioner

BOB ROWE, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Rhonda J. Simmons
Commission Secretary

(SEAL)

NOTE: Any interested party may request the Commission to reconsider this decision. A motion to reconsider must be filed within ten (10) days. See ARM 38.2.4806.